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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PM/FO  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO  
DOD FOR OSD USDP EDELMAN, ASD LONG, DAS KIMMITT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/01/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR MARR MCAPS MOPS UNSC LE  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: WITH USDP EDELMAN, ACTING LAF COMMANDER  
REQUESTS HELICOPTERS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman assured Acting Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander MG Shawki al-Masri of the U.S.'s commitment to assisting the LAF. Expressing his appreciation, Masri said timing of the assistance is "very critical". Noting that the LAF is assuming some of the Internal Security Forces' responsibilities, Masri stressed the LAF's need for helicopters to fight militias and terrorists. Assistant Secretary of Defense Mary Beth Long agreed to send Masri a capabilities matrix outlining various helicopter options. Masri told the delegation that the LAF is on schedule to commence the Comprehensive Training Program by September ¶2008. End summary.

LAF MUST RESTORE  
PUBLIC ORDER

¶2. (C) Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman, Assistant Secretary of Defense Mary Beth Long, and CENTCOM J5 Policy and Planning Director Major General Allardice met with Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Acting Commander MG Shawki al-Masri at Yarze on May 31. CDA, DATT, Office of Defense Cooperation Chief, PolOff, and DOD staff also attended. Edelman expressed the U.S.'s support for the LAF and in particular, the establishment of a bilateral working group to develop newly-elected President Michel Sleiman's national defense strategy and to plan the way forward for U.S. assistance to train and equip the LAF.

¶3. (C) The LAF must first and foremost work to restore public order inside Lebanon, against militia and terrorist groups, and secure Lebanon's border, Masri declared. Citing close cooperation with the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation, Masri said he expected the Comprehensive Training Program (CTP) to commence at the beginning of September. Masri reiterated the LAF's equipment priorities, referencing its three- and five-year plans submitted to the U.S. the previous year.

HELICOPTERS MOST PRESSING NEED

¶4. (C) He noted that the LAF'S three-year plan requests "only what is most essential." The LAF, he said, is now fulfilling its own mission as well as that of the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Edelman responded that the ISF mission should not be entirely shouldered by the LAF and the U.S. is

exploring how to provide assistance to the ISF, perhaps through section 1207 funding. The U.S., however, will continue to make assistance to the LAF our priority, Edelman assured Masri.

¶ 15. (C) In addition to hiring and training more than 25,000 more people, the LAF needs newer equipment, Masri said. Close-air support attack helicopters are highest on the LAF's list, he explained, because an air force gives the LAF an advantage over the militias and terrorists, who can destroy tanks with RPGs. He added that the LAF could not have defeated Fatah al-Islam during the previous year's fighting at Nahr al-Barid without helicopters. Training is needed, either on new weapons, if received, or on the current weapons, he stated.

¶ 16. (C) A/S Long agreed to provide Masri with a list of the various platforms available for different helicopter options, laying out the different capabilities so that Masri can choose which helicopters are best suited for Lebanon. She will also include data on timetables, sustainability of parts, training requirements, and integratability with other purchases. She noted that she will be returning to Lebanon in September for the initiation of the Bi-lateral Defense Committee (BDC), which had been on hold until a new president took office.

¶ 17. (C) Masri noted that the LAF favors Cobra helicopters, adding that LAF engineers would require minimal training to be able to maintain them. If it is not possible to obtain Cobras, he said, then he is willing to look into other options. Edelman impressed upon Masri the U.S.'s concern that the LAF procure receive helicopters that it can easily maintain, explaining that other countries have experienced difficulty maintaining the Cobras. Allardice added that upgrading the Huey UH-I to Huey UH-II is advantageous because Hueys are easy to get into flight quickly and cheaper to maintain.

#### ADDITIONAL LAF ASSISTANCE

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¶ 18. (C) Edelman told Masri that the U.S. hoped to be able to provide 10-20 tactical UAVs, which could be delivered in just a few months; coastal patrol vessels, which would take one year; and secure communications. Masri responded that the LAF is willing to receive what the U.S. can provide, stressing that time is of the essence so that the LAF is ready for anything. Edelman expressed the U.S. commitment to the LAF, adding that his staff will get these bilateral assistance agreements underway in the coming months of 2008.

¶ 19. (U) USDP Edelman has cleared this cable.

SISON